

Lauren Peterson

Context:

The Caste System in Ancient India

World History I – 9<sup>th</sup> grade

Caste System Characteristics:

- A complex social system that is a feature of Hinduism
- People are born into their caste
- A person's caste is tied to their occupation
- People cannot change their caste
- People cannot marry or socialize outside their caste

Overview:

The caste system is a very complex and intricate social system that determines social status achieved by birth. The main characteristics of the caste system are listed above. There are five Varnas or social orders created by the Hindu god Brahman, which is the classification of people for the caste system.

1. Brahmins or high priests  
These priests have the responsibilities to provide the spiritual and intellectual needs of the society.
2. Kshatriyas or the warriors and the rulers  
These warriors and rulers have the responsibility to protect the society.
3. Vaisyas or the merchants and the land owners  
These people were entrusted by Brahman for the agriculture and commerce of the society.
4. Sudras or the laborers and the artisans  
These people are commissioned to do and perform all the human labor for the society.
5. The Untouchables  
This is the lowest class with all the dirty jobs relating to bodily decay and dirt.

Instructional Model:

The concept formation model allows students to identify the characteristics of a concept for themselves and then come up with a definition. Ideally, the concept should tie into an overarching theme and/or other lessons that the students have learned. This lesson is taught using the concept formation model because it is important for students to understand the difference between the caste system and the more familiar concept of class. Students have difficulty understanding the differences, so it will be useful for them to look more closely at the

concept of the caste system in a systematic way that includes examples. This lesson will use the whole 55 minute second block class and half of the 100 minute third block class.

During this lesson students will see examples and non-examples of the Hindu caste system. They will not know what the concept is at this point. They will build the concept for themselves through the examples given. Individually, the students will answer a series of questions about each example. In pairs, they will list differences and similarities among the examples. This will lead them to develop a list of characteristics of the concept. The characteristics will be discussed with the whole class, and the class will come up with a definition. From the definition, the students should be able to guess what the concept is; the caste system.

We will then go over the caste system in India in slightly more detail. I will introduce the levels of the caste system with a short video (link below). Then I will show the caste system pyramid on a PowerPoint slide, so the students have a visual for the concept. (This image is provided at the end of the lesson plan.) The students may wonder if there is any way to have social mobility in this system. The answer that they need to know is that a person in the lower castes can only change castes by fulfilling the duties of their present caste in this life and become reincarnated into a higher caste. After this, the students will see non-examples of the caste system. In other words, they will see examples of class. They will identify why these are not examples of caste.

<http://videos.howstuffworks.com/discovery/29748-discovery-atlas-indian-caste-system-video.htm>

Objectives:

- The students will be able to identify the characteristics of the caste system in India. (WHI.4b)
- The students will be able to recognize how the caste system differs from the concept of social class in our own society. (NCSS, culture, time/continuity/change, and people/places/environments)
- The student will know that the caste system is illegal in India today, but it is still practiced by some people in India. (NCSS, time/continuity/change)
- The students will develop their note taking skills, specifically in terms of pulling out relevant information from a text and expanding their explanations beyond a few words.

Assessment:

Students will be assessed on their answers on the charts of examples and non-examples, the characteristics list, and the definition. This will be a formative assessment. The sheets will not be graded because students should keep them as part of their notebook. These sheets will be assessed as I walk around the room based on the thoughtfulness that students put into them, not

necessarily if they get all the correct answers on their own. This is shown through how much students write down and if their discussions with their pairs are on topic. Students will receive feedback during the lesson as I walk around to the groups and during the section when the whole class comes together to decide on a definition. I will want to determine the level of confusion that students are having with the concept and the instructional model so that adjustments can be made for future teachings of this topic. We will go through the non-examples chart at the end of class.

Content and Instructional Strategies:

- I. Definition: A caste system is a complex social system in Hindu culture. It is based on a person's occupation and birth. The person can only marry and socialize within their own caste, which cannot be changed.
- II. Hook: Lunchroom scene from the movie Mean Girls  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gZ\\_qXmxdgGM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gZ_qXmxdgGM)  
Students will be asked what they see in the clip and if this scene is an example of anything. This clip will be discussed again as a non-example of the caste system after students successfully identify the concept and before they move onto the non-examples sheet. Effectively, it will be the non-example that we go through together before they practice on their own. This should take about 5 minutes.
- III. Examples: (My CT was clear that all examples must come from Hinduism, but they are in different countries and time periods.) First, I will explain the Concept Formation instructional model so that students understand how the lesson will unfold. The chart sheet is below the lesson plan. Students will fill out this sheet by working with their pair. This could take up to 15 minutes because there are a number of students in this class who read slowly.

Many rulers in ancient India practiced Hinduism. After a ruler's death, the oldest son would take his father's place as ruler and marry a woman who was from another ruling family. The other sons would become warriors. Warriors were seen as the defenders of the society and deserving of influence and power. They would all spend their lives in the upper levels of society.

[www.hinduwisdom.info/War\\_in\\_Ancient\\_India.htm](http://www.hinduwisdom.info/War_in_Ancient_India.htm) and  
[www.bibliotecapleyades.net/vimanas/esp\\_vimanas\\_11a.htm](http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/vimanas/esp_vimanas_11a.htm)

The people in the upper levels of society in India insist that Giri has bad karma. Why else would he, like his ancestors, be born an Untouchable, if not to pay for his past lives? He is a leatherworker, and Hindu law says that working with animal skins makes him unclean, someone to avoid and scorn.

<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0306/feature1/>

Ravi lives in the United States. His parents moved here from India, and they practice Hinduism. Ravi's father is a doctor. Ravi will grow up to become a doctor, and he will marry the daughter of a doctor. (Disclaimer: This is an example. Not all Hindus in the U.S. will continue this practice. I may not include this statement on the sheet, but I do want to mention to students that not all Hindus today will adhere to this practice.)

80 percent of people in Nepal are Hindu and many of them adhere to the traditions of Hinduism. The Nepalese Brahmins (priests) are high in the social order and will be respected. They must marry someone of the same social status. Their children will follow the same path.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepalese caste system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepalese_caste_system) and  
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/np.html>

IV. Differences, Similarities, Characteristics, and Definition:

This sheet is at the end of the lesson plan. The students will work in their pairs to come up with the differences and similarities. These will be based on what they read in the examples and their answers in the chart. These will be discussed as a whole class and characteristics will be developed as a whole class. Everything the students come up with on this sheet will be discussed as a whole class, and I will write them on the board as they identify the differences, similarities, and characteristics. Students will try to come up with a definition on their own, and then we will put together a class definition from students' input. This should take about 15 minutes.

V. Mini-Lecture: After students identify the concept as the caste system, there will be a short lecture on caste system and Hinduism to make sure that students have heard all of the important aspects of the topic. This will begin with a short video (link above). Afterwards, I will hand out the pyramid sheet so that students do not need to replicate this image in their notes, but instead pay attention to the material being presented. This pyramid is a visual representation of the material presented in the short video and part of the lecture. This should take about 10 minutes.

VI. Chart of Non-Examples: This sheet is at the end of the lesson. First, we will revisit the clip seen at the beginning of the lesson, and discuss why the high school in Mean Girls is not an example of the caste system (beyond just that the students are not Hindu). Students will fill these out individually, and then we will go over them as a class. Students should provide multiple reasons for each non-example. The reasons

will be based on the notes they took of the characteristics and definition that they developed earlier. This is the section when students will show what they know. Their reasoning should be based on the reading and notes that they have done throughout the lesson. This is a section where students can use their prior knowledge of what they learned about ancient Egypt and ancient Mesopotamia previously in the course. They should recognize and point out the differences and similarities of those cultures versus ancient India based on the examples and non-examples. This will help them to realize and remember that the caste system is unique to India/Hinduism. This activity should take about 10 minutes.

Non-examples (source list):

Why are these NOT examples of the caste system? List all reasons.

After the pharaoh Tutankamen's death, the royal vizier, Ay, married Tut's widow and took over the throne. Ay was succeeded by the formal general, Horemheb. Neither Ay nor Horemheb were royal by birth. (from memory, backed up by the references of the research done for the book *The Murder of King Tut*, James Patterson)

**Sue Sylvester:** "High school is a caste system. Kids fall into certain slots. Your jocks and your popular kids up in the penthouse. The invisibles and the kids playing live-action out in the forest: bottom floor."

**Will Schuester:** "And... where do the Glee kids lie?"

**Sue Sylvester:** "Subbasement."

(From Glee, <http://www.suesylvester.net/quotes/glee-season-1/episode-1-pilot/>)

Oprah Winfrey was born in rural Mississippi, and she spent her early years living in poverty on her grandmother's farm. She went to live with her father in Tennessee. Oprah landed a job in radio while still in high school and began co-anchoring the local evening news at the age of 19. Her emotional ad-lib delivery eventually got her transferred to the daytime-talk-show arena, and after boosting a third-rated local Chicago talk show to first place, she launched her own production company and became internationally famous.

[http://www.forbes.com/2007/06/22/billionaires-gates-winfrey-biz-cz ts\\_0626rags2riches.html](http://www.forbes.com/2007/06/22/billionaires-gates-winfrey-biz-cz ts_0626rags2riches.html)

and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oprah\\_Winfrey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oprah_Winfrey)

Sargon of Akkad (2334-2279 BCE) was raised by a man who was a gardener. Eventually he managed to become a prominent member of the royal court of Kish. He claimed the throne of Akkad and conquered ancient Mesopotamia.

*Celibacy in the Ancient World: Its Ideal and Practice in Pre-Hellenistic Israel, Mesopotamia, and Greece*, Dale Launderville

## Resources:

- Computer with Internet and PowerPoint
- Examples chart, Differences/Similarities sheet, Non-examples sheet – copies for each student (included at end of lesson plan)
- Copies of pyramid for IEP student (discussed in adaptations section)
- Usual classroom set up, pairs

## Differentiation:

This lesson includes visuals in the forms of video clips and a PowerPoint image. It also includes text. Students will work as individuals, in pairs, and together as a whole class. They will discuss their ideas with pairs, and they will also use their notes to write the definition sentence(s). This lesson works for learners who need visuals, learners who like the organization of charts, learners who like to discuss their ideas, and learners who need to have information written down. This offers students a variety of ways to take in the information and share what they know.

This lesson challenges students because they will construct their own knowledge on the topic as they go through the steps of the concept lesson. However, there is enough scaffolding to lead students to the correct concept. This is a good thing for ninth graders that do not engage in this type of lesson very frequently.

## Adaptations:

In the second block class of World History I there are a few students with IEPs. One student cannot look at the PowerPoint and take notes at the same time. He needs the notes printed out for him. All students could benefit from having the pyramid printed out, so they don't need to worry about drawing while taking notes. This is why I will make a copy of the caste system pyramid to give to the students. He also needs extra time to read the examples. I have tried to make the examples short while still hitting all the necessary characteristics of the caste system. It will help this student to work with his pair. Also, the answers to the questions on the examples sheet require only a few words so he will not need to write full sentences which take him extra time.

There are also a couple of students with IEPs that my CT has said their main issue is lack of motivation. I hope that the video clip hook will grab their attention and keep them motivated long enough to complete the individual section. Hopefully moving to pairs, showing another video, and showing an image while discussing the caste system will provide enough variety to maintain their interest. My CT is still working on how to motivate these students himself, so I am just trying to pay attention and take note of what works and what does not work.

The features of this lesson that work for the students with IEPs should also be helpful to the rest of the class for similar reasons. The ninth graders in general need variety to maintain their

interest, and they all struggle to come up with definitions that encompass the entirety of a concept. The class is structured for students who need that type of environment. This lesson is achievable for ninth grade students without being too easy.

#### Reflections:

The students do not engage in this style of lesson often, so I am concerned about some frustration on their part. I am particularly concerned about the initial examples. I tried to make them simple enough to clearly relate to the characteristics, but they may come off as too hypothetical sounding. Students should know that this was a real social system practiced for a long time. However, these types of examples seemed like the best option for having variety in the examples while still having them show all the characteristics. To assuage some of the frustration, students will have read the section in their textbooks about ancient India prior to this lesson. The caste system is mentioned in the textbook, but not in detail so this should not have students guessing the concept too early.

There may also be some issues with switching from individual work to pairs and coming back to the whole class. This lesson will be taught soon in the fall, and I have not yet developed a relationship with the many of the students (because I have not been in my placement long). Positive relationships is the basis of my cooperating teacher's classroom management style, and I agree with this approach but am concerned that I have not had the time to develop this as yet. If nothing else, I can work during this lesson to improve my relationship building with the students. Having observed the class a number of times, I anticipate that the class will not become unruly but they will try to get me off-topic. I will keep this in mind and work on steering the class back to the lesson at hand.

#### Post- Reflection:

Overall this lesson went well, but there were some issues. Moments before class began, I learned that my hook video would not be available. My CT thought that there would be no issue using the clip, but since it is a commercial movie they have to get a signature from the principal. Unfortunately, the principal had been out of the school building for a couple of days prior to my lesson, so the signature could not be obtained. This led to my starting the lesson without much of a plan. I began by explaining the lesson and handing out the papers, but as this was not the intended way of beginning this lesson, it did not work as well as the hook might have.

There was some confusion on the differences, similarities, and characteristics chart. I recognized that this was because the students did not understand where the lesson was heading. I stopped the class and explained the lesson again in another way. I also modeled how to get started for the whole class. This section turned out to be more of a whole class activity in the first section. My CT suggested that I lead with a stronger explanation, so the second time I taught this lesson I did just that. It went much better, and there was much less confusion. I also made a simple PowerPoint to go along with the lesson. It included the links to the videos, all of the sheets, the

pyramid, and pictures of the non-examples. The function of this was to keep myself and the students organized. Simply by looking up, they could see which sheet they were supposed to be working on. They also noticed when I changed the slide, allowing me to more easily capture their attention and move them along to the next step.

I was in these classes after I taught the lesson as well. Students retained the key information that I had wanted them to learn. Some of them even drew the pyramid when asked how they would remember the information for a test.

I decided to keep my charts of examples and non-examples as they were for a couple of reasons. I showed them to my CT, and he thought that the materials I created were good. I took his word that they would work for his students because he knows his students and their ability levels much better than I do. The other reason was because I searched for examples that would not be so clear, and it was difficult to find anything trustworthy or substantive. Instead of using lower quality examples, I chose to stick with all non-examples that were engaging (they activate students' prior knowledge from the course and celebrities they would know from outside of school) and would help them identify most of the characteristics of the caste system as being absent from the non-examples. It worked in the way that I intended it to work. Many students volunteered answers, and they showed that they could identify all the characteristics and understood them. After the chart, I debriefed students so that they would know that the caste system is technically illegal in India today and there are many Hindus who do not practice this system anymore. I would probably not choose to teach this concept in this format again because it is too narrow. I would use concept formation for larger concepts that would have more potential to cross topics and locations.

PASS Standards:

Higher Order Thinking: 3 Students were primarily engaged in lower order thinking because this lesson involved a lot of repetition to make certain that students would learn and remember the characteristics of the caste system. However, there were a couple of points in the lesson that had students engaging in higher order thinking. They had to synthesize all the information in a coherent and comprehensive definition. They also brought up thoughtful questions or comments during the mini-lecture.

Deep Knowledge: 3.5 Most students sustained a focus on the topic, but there was a good deal of confusion at the beginning of the lesson. Eventually students caught on since I varied up the way I was presenting the lesson, and they did retain the information that they learned from the lesson. This lesson could not score higher because there was some amount of uneven treatment of knowledge because I could not answer all of their questions on present day India showing that I wanted deep knowledge in some areas but not other areas.

Substantive Conversation: 2 Students conversed on the topic in their pairs and during the whole group sections of the lesson. This conversation was not scripted by the teacher, but it was

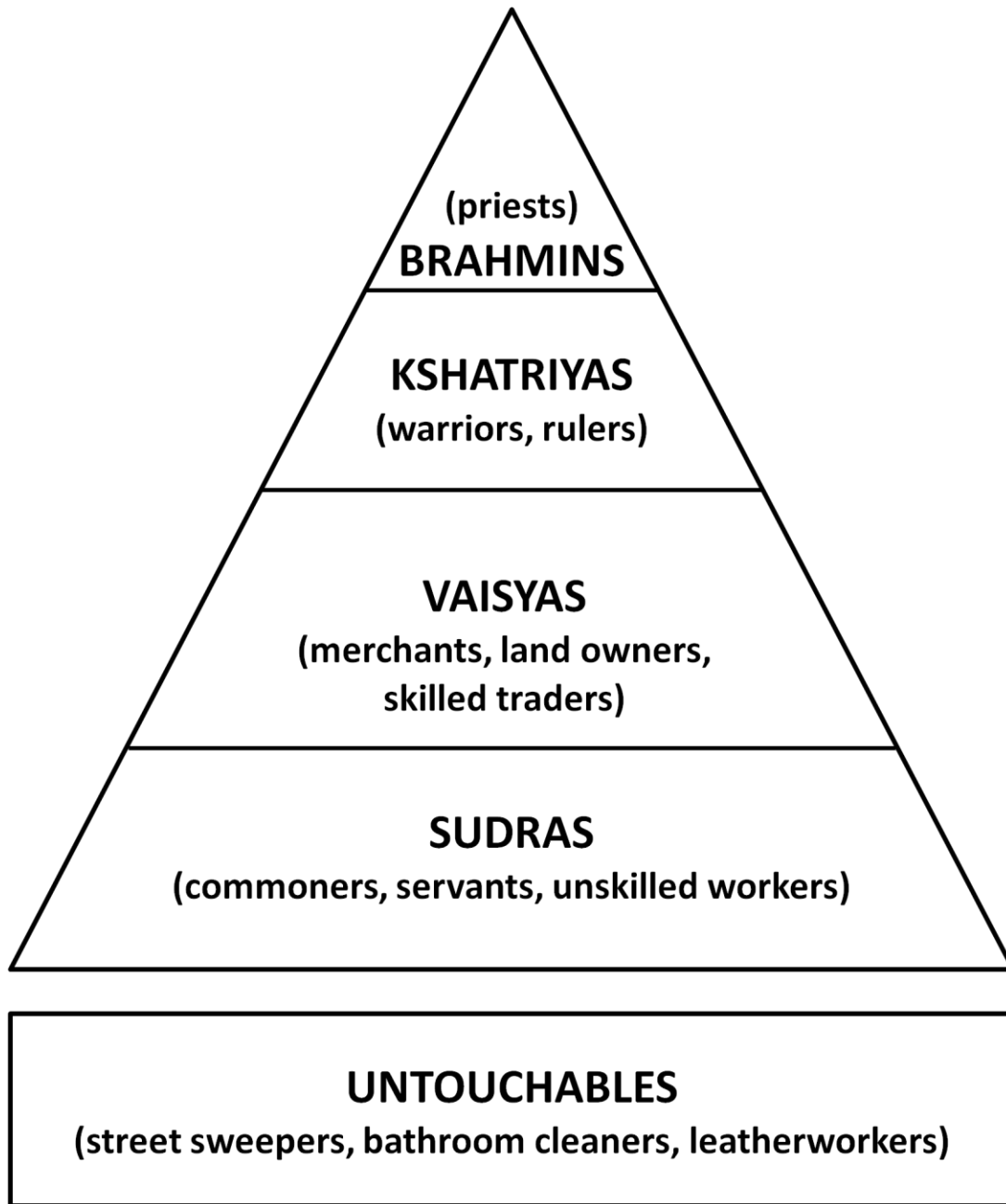


heavily structured by the teacher. This was just not a lesson that involved much conversation between students or even student and teacher.

Connections to the World Beyond the Classroom: 2 I did mention modern day India and Hindus living in America, and I explained the current situation that the caste system is illegal but still practiced by some Hindus today. Students were interested in this and asked several questions, but some I could not answer. Also, it was certainly not the focus of the lesson.

Ethical Valuing: 2 Students found the caste system to be an ethical concern, as it has been in India as evidenced by the outlawing of the practice. A few students seemed concerned about this issue and interested in it. They asked questions and made statements in an effort to understand, but again this was not the focus of the lesson.

Integration: 5 This lesson incorporated three types of integration which served to enhance the students' social understanding. This lesson helped students to build knowledge on the topic and skills by having them write out comprehensive definitions. This lesson certainly incorporated time and place because ancient India was connected with modern India, and we discussed how and why the caste system does not exist in other countries like the U.S. Technology was used to help students gain content in a meaningful way, and also as a classroom management tool.



(created myself from information in the textbook and video clip linked above)

### Chart of Examples

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

	Does the person's social status change? Yes/No	What religion are the people?	What determines the person's place in society?	Do they marry or socialize with people who are different from themselves? Yes/No
<p>Many rulers in ancient India practiced Hinduism. After a ruler's death, the oldest son would take his father's place as ruler and marry a woman who was from another ruling family. The other sons would become warriors. Warriors were seen as the defenders of the society and deserving of influence and power. They would all spend their lives in the upper levels of society.</p>				
<p>Giri is a person living in India. People in the upper levels of society in India insist that Giri has bad Karma. Why else would he, like his ancestors, be born an Untouchable, if not to pay for his past lives? He is a leatherworker, and Hindu law says that working with animal skins makes him unclean, someone to avoid and scorn.</p>				
<p>Ravi lives in the United States. His parents moved here from India, and they practice Hinduism. Ravi's father is a doctor. Ravi will grow up to become a doctor, and he will marry the daughter of a doctor. *</p>				
<p>80 percent of people in Nepal are Hindu and many of them adhere to the traditions of Hinduism. The Nepalese Brahmins (priests) are high in the social order and will be respected. They must marry someone of the same social status. Their children will follow the same path.</p>				

\*This is an example. Not all Hindus in the U.S. today will continue this practice.

## Information Gathering Sheet

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Differences:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Similarities:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Concept Characteristics:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Definition:

## Class vs. Caste

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Why are these NOT examples of the caste system? List all reasons.

1. After the pharaoh Tutankhamen's death, the royal vizier, Ay, married Tut's widow and took over the throne. Ay was succeeded by the former general, Horemheb. Neither Ay nor Horemheb were royal by birth.
2. **Sue Sylvester:** "High school is a caste system. Kids fall into certain slots. Your jocks and your popular kids up in the penthouse. The invisibles and the kids playing live-action out in the forest: bottom floor."  
**Will Schuester:** "And... where do the Glee kids lie?"  
**Sue Sylvester:** "Subbasement."
3. Oprah Winfrey was born in rural Mississippi, and she spent her early years living in poverty on her grandmother's farm. She went to live with her father in Tennessee. Oprah landed a job in radio while still in high school and began co-anchoring the local evening news at the age of 19. Her emotional ad-lib delivery eventually got her transferred to the daytime-talk-show arena, and after boosting a third-rated local Chicago talk show to first place, she launched her own production company and became a billionaire.
4. Sargon of Akkad (2334-2279 BCE) was raised by a man who was a gardener. Eventually he managed to become a prominent member of the royal court of Kish. He claimed the throne of Akkad and conquered ancient Mesopotamia.